

CATS begins service to Carowinds

If you are heading to Paramount's Carowinds this season, leave your car at home and take a relaxing and cheaper way to get there. Charlotte Area Transit System's (CATS) Route 42X Carowinds Express began service to Paramount's Carowinds, Saturday, March 25.

CATS provides this seasonal service in conjunction with the City of Charlotte's Economic Development Department and Carowinds. Economic Development conducts the Mayor's Youth Employment Program, which is a free referral service that matches up job-seeking youth, ages 16-21, with local employers. The program encourages area businesses to train and prepare youth to enter the job market by providing jobs that further their occupational skills. "CATS is excited to provide a convenient and safe way for our youth to get to work. Plus this route offers park-goers an alternative way to get to Carowinds for a visit," said Larry Kopf, Transit Services Development Manager for CATS.

Route 42X Carowinds Express will provide bus service to the park every day that the park is open to the public. Employees of Carowinds and citizens wanting to go visit the park can hop aboard the 42X Carowinds Express at the Charlotte Transportation Center in Center City and go straight to the park without any stops. Trips start as early as 8:30 a.m. and go until one hour after the park is closed every day that the park is open for business. One-way fare is \$1.65.

To learn more about CATS and its services, please call 704-336-RIDE or visit us on the web at www.ridetransit.org.

Get Involved!

Neighborhood Symposium

Join neighbors from throughout the city for an enlightening and energizing day of community building. The Neighborhood Symposium is a forum that provides opportunities for neighborhood leaders and residents to learn about resources, share ideas for improving neighborhoods, and network across physical and social boundaries.

Saturday, April 22,
8 am - 4 pm
Charlotte Marriott City Center
100 West Trade Street

For more information call 704.336.2061 or visit neighborhoods.charmeck.org.

Volunteer at Charlotte-Douglas!

The airport is looking for energetic and outgoing volunteers to meet, greet and assist passengers during their travel experience at Charlotte Douglas Airport. Make a difference and become a part of this new and exciting customer service program. For more information about volunteering at the airport, please call 704.359.1120 or email volunteer@charlotteairport.com.



Gang intervention program reaches out to community

Gang activity is a growing concern in Charlotte with an estimated 75 active gangs within the City. To reduce youth and gang crime, the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department's Gang of One, its gang intervention program, works to prevent children joining these groups. Gang of One is reaching out to community groups, churches and other organizations to educate them on the various aspects of gang induction and life.

"When we first established Gang of One, we knew we would receive phone calls for children who are currently in or being pressured into joining a gang," said Rev. Frances Cook, Gang of One Director, "What we didn't expect to receive was so many calls from church congregations, groups that work with children, and people who are starting to see gang activity in their communities."

She and Det. Harold Jackson, with the Crime Intelligence Unit, speak to these groups about the realities of being in a gang. Cook and Jackson also will meet with parents, who suspect that their children are in gangs. "We can talk with them and their children about being involved in gangs as well as discuss resources and alternatives available to them such as sporting activities, tutoring, job placement and arts programs," Cook said. "We don't want them to just say no to gangs but yes to other possibilities in their lives."

"Gangs aren't just a police problem. It's a community problem," Jackson said. "With the gang lifestyle so pervasive in our culture such as in music and movies, we need the community to be involved." For more information on gangs or for a presentation, call the 24-hour Gang of One hotline at 704.432.4264.



The Gang of One presentation provides attendees a glimpse of gang paraphernalia.

CMPD officer receives bronze star

During a ceremony at Charleston Air Force Base on March 17, 2006, Vice President Dick Cheney awarded the bronze star to Chief Master Sgt Michael Schmiede, for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding service as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Superintendent from May 26 to September 15, 2005 during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

When Schmiede isn't wearing the uniform of the U.S. Air Force Reserve, he dons the uniform of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department. With the CMPD since 1994, he is assigned currently to the North Tryon Division.

As a member of the reserve, Schmiede has been deployed twice, and he anticipates a third deployment. "Before deployments, things that might have seemed important like being stuck in traffic, running late now don't matter," he said. "The things that I used to hold loosely, I want to hold tighter such as time with my family and seeing my kids grow up."

The bronze star recognizes Schmiede's exceptional skill and leadership during two dangerous missions. During the first mission, Schmiede donned a bomb suite and cleared a bomb located near an Iraqi home, saving the lives of six children. On the second mission, Schmiede and his team disarmed a buried explosive device. Schmiede said such hidden explosives, which target passing patrols are common.

Schmiede remains humble about his recent recognition. "No one is awarded a medal of valor or bronze star in a vacuum," Schmiede said. "It doesn't happen due to some singular distinctive act. It was a team effort. I had the privilege of working with 32 people who worked as hard as me and were just as dedicated. It bears my name on the certificate, but it really should have a roster of every subordinate that worked with me."



Photo by Airman 1st Class Nicolas Pilch

Vice President Dick Cheney with Chief Master Sgt Michael Schmiede before awarding him the bronze star.